**2024.07.21 Speech Commemoration Lancaster Popeye Crash 80 years.**

Dear relatives, dear invited and interested people,

First: Thank you Colin for your kind words and to all the relatives for their appreciation. I have said it many times: No matter what we do, we will never be able to pay you back for the loss of your loved ones.

There is so much to tell about the past 80 years, I will start with the present.

Yesterdaymorning we accompanied the relatives to the cemetary. They thought we were just going to put flowers on the graves, but we had a surprise for them.

About one year ago, Edgar Zaagsma, Papendrecht Consul of the Wargraves and Pieter van Turenhout, working at the cemetary, - who welcomed us that morning - came to us with a plan, to realize an information board, opposit the graves. To inform everyone, who has never heard of the fatal crash. In constructive cooperation with us the design for the informationboard was realized and placed.

Yesterday it was covered with the Papendrecht flag. After a short explanation about the plan and realisation, Tyler Anderson and Charlie Simpson, greatgrandsons of pilote Colin Clarey, were given the honour of unveiling the beautiful informationboard, with photo’s of all the crewmembers and a short explanation.

The relatives were moved and emotional after seeinig it. It was one of the many moments these days we shared feelings, hugs and tears.

We held a moment of silence and put the flowers on the graves, without anyone holding us back.

At that moment I recalled 21st of July 1944, the day the Popeye crew was buried at the cemetary. The Germans did not allow any form of paying respect to the crew, but Dokter Rietveld, head of the local resistance, ignored that and ordered a wreath by a local florist, who was sort of scared if the Germans would find out. Dokter Rietveld insisted, the florist made the wreath and Dokter Rietveld put it on the graves in the night. The Germans were furious but never found out who did it.

In 1945 the Papendrecht department of the National Poppy Committee, made efforts to get in cotact with the relatives. Among them: Jan and Anna van Wijngaarden, grandparents of Erwin, Mr. And Mrs. Kloot and Mrs. Moolhuijzen, wife of Dokter Moolhuijzen. She was the only one speeking English.

In 1945, Jan van Wijngaarden wrote to the relatives a letter which ended with: we will always remember them. It was from Dutch translated in English before it was sent by postal mail, and the replies, all handwritten, vice versa.

This promise, given in 1945, handed over to next generations, was the best inscription for the monument we could think of and today, almost 80 years later we still try to fill in that promise as good as we can.

Compared to then, it is easier for us, we have computers, there is Google translate, we make pictures and can send them with one click.

But for the members of the Poppy Committee, language was not an issue at all.

For letters they had a personal translater and when relatives came to visit, a warm handshake, an arm around a shoulder, a big hug, a meal, did not need translation.

After the members of the Poppy Committee passed away, the job was taken over by Jan van der Giessen, Peter Jan’s father and Jan van Wijngaarden, Erwins father.

In 1981Judith Simpson-Clarey and John Clarey, children of Colin Clarey visited the graves, Peter Jan was there as well, then 15 years old.

He joined in and kept on – even after the passing away of his father – searching for addresses of relatives, and succeeded, so we were able to reconnect again.

Over the past 80 years many relatives came to Papendrecht. Wives, parents, brothers and sisters, children, grandchildren, friends. Some of them came without notifying anyone, they just wanted to see the graves and left again.

Especially now we are standing here today, it is sad, that from the group of 2004, the unveiling of this monument, many passed away already, and some were not able to be here today. In our minds they are!

But how grateful we are for the wonderful group of relatives we have here this year.

Colin already mentioned them, so I am not going to repeat.

An exception for two ladies:

Heather, 80 years old and Linda will be 80 in 2025, both still going strong. We hope to have many visits ahead of us.

Thank you all for the efforts you made to join in and the many hours of travelling.

We shared already so many beautiful moments together, Relatives from several crewmembers and various countries, some of them had never seen eachother before. But right from the start of the visit, they mingled and it feels like one big family.

Like Colin said, the loss of the Popeye crew echoes through the generations, they all share the same history and loss.

And we, Peter Jan, Erwin and me, tried and will continue trying to be the balm on their scars and therefore we feel being part of this big family too.

Sometimes it crosses my mind: What if the crash had not happened and the crew had survived the war, then the relatives had lived many years with their loved ones. We would have been very happy for them.

But: they would never have had a reason to visit Papendrecht and we would have missed all these warm, memorable visits and stories. It cannot take away the greef and pain, but hopefully it is a small comfort.

I want to thank my fellow members of the Taskforce, Peter Jan and Erwin, for the way we cooperated in organizing this remembrance service and the program for the relatives. We kept on adding items, had to reschedule more than once, It was sometimes stressfull, but so valuable to do. I hope we can go on for many years to come.

And I have to say this: Peter Jan, your father Jan and father in law Arie, Erwin your mother Adrie and grandparents Jan and Anna would have been so proud of you.

I think my parents would have been too.

I could talk for hours about the stories behind the seven brave airmen, but I suggest:

Go and visit Museum Dorpsbehoud. Until december there is a special exhibition ‘They paid the highest price!!’, dedicated to the Popeye crew.

Today we are going to end this commemoration with music.

There is a beautiful song, about a veteran,

who wants to remind people of the value of freedom.

May van der Giessen, third generation of Van der Giessens, involved in the remembrance of the Popeye Crew, will sing it for all of us.

The song is called: All gave some, some gave all.

The chorus line is:

If you ever think of me, think of all your liberty and recall:

Some gave all.

Or as we keep on saying: We will always remember them.

H.M.(Margré) van Wijngaarden,

On behalf of Board Dorpsbehoud

and

Task Force Lancaster Popeye,

Peter Jan van der Giessen and Erwin van Wijngaarden.